

Sam-mise. PNH

HAS THE MINISTER A "CLOSED SHOP?"

1644

BY CHARLES STELZLE.

It has been said by some labor leaders that the minister has no right to talk against the "closed shop," because he himself has the greatest "closed shop" in the country. The same thing has been said with regard to the lawyer and the physician. It is not my purpose to argue the merits of the "closed shop," neither shall I speak for the lawyer or the physician. There are some things, however, with regard to the position of the minister in this connection that should be stated. There are some fundamental differences between the "closed shop" of the unionist and the ministers' association.

In the first place the labor union declares that unless a man belongs to the union he may not work at his trade. This is not true with regard to the ministers' association. Any man has a right to preach, and no ministers' association will attempt to prevent him. There are thousands of evangelists all over the world, who have never been ordained and who do not belong to any so-called "ministers' union." Some of the most famous preachers in history were never ordained. I need but mention the names of Dwight L. Moody and Charles H. Spurgeon to prove this statement. The

“shop door” of the ministry is wide open to anyone who desires to preach.

Any man may preach and organize a Church if he chooses, but the people themselves have the right to say whether or not he shall preach for them. The ministers’ association has nothing to do with this. Any man may go to Africa, China, or Asia and start a mission station to preach to the heathen, as hundreds have done in the past, and nobody will prevent him, but the man who criticises the Church is not doing this sort of thing.

For convenience sake and for the sake of propriety the Church sets apart men for special functions, such as the administering of the communion and of baptism. These functions, however, are performed only occasionally—in most Churches only a few times a year. Surely not even the most strenuous unionist would be indifferent as to who baptized his children, or who administered to him the sacraments of the Church. Furthermore, the whole Church is responsible for the so-called “closed shop” in this connection. Every member in it recognizes the propriety of setting apart a minister for the performance of these special functions, and every member heartily accepts—indeed, insists upon—setting apart the minister for this work.

There are some Churches which go so

far as to permit a layman to administer the sacraments, so that there is practically no difference between the layman and an ordained minister so far as this matter is concerned. But it will be noted that it is the people themselves, even in these cases, who determine who shall serve them in this capacity.

The labor union in seeking to enforce the "closed shop" idea is an outside and irresponsible organization (I use the term in no invidious sense), seeking to place regulations upon another individual, or organization. The Church in placing restrictions upon its ministers is an organization enforcing rules upon *itself*, for the regulation of its own affairs. It is a similar case to unions placing restrictions upon their own officers, as they have a perfect right to do, and as in fact is essential to the existence of the unions.

In England certain families have private chaplains. If the ministerial associations of England should try to force a minister upon such a family, it would be a case similar to that of the unions requiring the "closed shop."

The above statement presents the argument against the most important phase of the question, but as the matter has been raised by others, it is only fair to show some further differences between the average labor union and the ministers' association.

The ministers' association does not close the door against apprentices, but constantly encourages novitiates, whereas many of the labor unions bar the door against apprentices. The "closed shop" of the minister is closed only to unworthy workingmen whose work cannot be endorsed or whose character is besmirched. The "closed shop" of the minister never limits the hours of labor, it never endeavors to enforce a uniform scale of wages, and I may say in passing that the salary of the average minister is less than that of the average day laborer.

The ministers' "closed shop" never strikes for higher wages; it never inaugurates sympathetic strikes; it never boycotts; it never limits the products of the workingman. This "closed shop" is open three hundred and sixty-five days of the year; it is in fullest sympathy with rich and poor, intelligent or ignorant, endeavoring to smooth asperities, and to produce peace and brotherhood among all men.

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